

SIGHT SAVING CLASSES

Matie M. Carter

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Sight-Saving Classes

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PREFACE

The State of New York is definitely committed through the enactment of special legislation to the development of educational services adapted to meet the needs of large groups of physically handicapped children. In the past, any child who deviated from the normal group suffered considerable loss in both educational and social advantages. His life in many cases was often a mere existence bearing its own burden of unhappiness and inefficiency. Today, however, through the cooperation of the State, the counties and the local school districts every effort is being made to provide adequate educational opportunities for these young people.

The special services provided for these children include transportation, special classes for the hard-of-hearing, crippled and those with seriously defective vision, and home teaching for those who can not attend school. Every effort is being made to prepare these young people for more successful and worth while living, thus increasing society's assets and decreasing its liabilities. The success of this program depends to a large degree upon the willingness of every community in the State to accept its share of responsibility for the education of the physically handicapped children.

The purpose of this bulletin is to direct careful attention to the educational needs of children with seriously defective

vision. For the most part children with curable eye conditions have very little, if any, difficulty in adjusting and keeping abreast of educational standards set for normal children. There is, however, a small percentage of children whose vision can not be so completely corrected. They deviate from the normal group to such an extent that their educational needs must be given special attention. For this reason sight-saving classes have been organized in many communities throughout the country. The number of children belonging to this group is not large — probably not more than one in 500. Yet, considered as individuals with a handicap, their educational needs are particularly great.

This bulletin was prepared under the direction of Joseph J. Endres, Chief of the Physically Handicapped Children's Bureau, by Matie M. Carter, Supervisor for Sight-Saving Classes. The Department gratefully acknowledges the generous help and constructive criticism of Mrs Winifred Hathaway of the National Committee for the Prevention of Blindness and others who advised with the Department in the preparation of the bulletin.

LEWIS A. WILSON

*Assistant Commissioner for Vocational
and Extension Education*

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A TYPICAL SIGHT-SAVING CLASSROOM

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Sight-Saving Classes

I ORGANIZATION AND ADMINISTRATION

OF SIGHT-SAVING CLASSES

NEED FOR SIGHT-SAVING CLASSES

Children having such seriously defective vision that they are unable to adjust themselves to the work of the regular grades should, whenever it is possible, receive the advantages of attending a sight-saving class.

With specially trained teachers and adequate equipment these classes serve many purposes. They provide the children with the advantages of an education of which they would otherwise either be deprived or which they would obtain only at the expense of their sight. They stress enough eye hygiene to acquaint the children with their eye difficulties and the proper care of them. Some vocational guidance is emphasized and constant effort is made to teach the children how to conserve their sight both in and out of school.

RESPONSIBILITY OF BOARD OF EDUCATION

In any community where there are ten or more children with such seriously defective vision that they are educationally handicapped, it is mandatory that the board of education establish a sight-saving class to meet their needs. To encourage the organization of such classes the law provides that a full elementary teacher's equivalent be allowed for each special teacher.

ELIGIBILITY TO SIGHT-SAVING CLASSES

The eligibility of children to sight-saving classes depends to a great extent upon the consideration of individual cases but the following four types make education in the regular grades practically impossible:

- 1 Children having more than 20/200 vision but not possessed of sufficient visual acuity to enable them to read ordinary print or to see letters and figures on the blackboard

- 2 Children with progressive eye difficulties

- 3 Children with diseases of the eye that seriously affect their vision

- 4 Children who are able to read ordinary print but only at the expense of their vision

The question may arise as to what specific types of cases may serve as a guide for class selection. If so, the following may serve the purpose:

1 Children who can not read more than 20/70 in the better eye with correction

2 Children who have progressive myopia, even though glasses may bring the vision up to nearly normal

3 Children suffering from eye diseases in which some irritation may be present, provided the approval of the attending physician is given

4 Any child, who in the opinion of the ophthalmologist, would benefit by assignment to a sight-saving class, subject to the acceptance of the educational authorities having charge of such classes

A person with normal vision reads the twentieth line on the eye test chart at twenty feet, making a visual acuity of 20/20. When the vision is defective, with an acuity of 20/70, for instance, it means that only the line marked 70 or above, having extremely large letters, can be read at 20 feet. The same is true of higher degrees of defect. The higher the line is numbered, the larger the letters.

INTELLIGENCE

It is assumed that all the children assigned to sight-saving classes have average normal mentality. Should there arise a question as to the placement of a child who has both a mental and visual handicap, the final determination should rest in favor of the greater of the two. Until mental tests are printed in large type to be used with children with defective vision, it may be necessary to give doubtful mental cases a trial in a sight-saving class before it is possible to decide whether the difficulty is a mental

condition or a lack of vision. Such a situation could, no doubt, be adjusted within a short period of time.

SIZE OF THE CLASS

The size of a sight-saving class depends upon the number of grades represented. In cities where the elementary schools consist of six grades, there is a possibility that all these grades may be represented in the sight-saving class. If so, the number must necessarily be small. A teacher can not do justice to more than 12 or 14 children when there is such a mixed group.

In school systems where eight grades are in the elementary schools it is almost impossible for one teacher to care for representatives of all grades in a sight-saving class. If possible, it is best to have two classes organized, one to care for the lower grades and the other the upper. In this way each teacher could easily care for 16 children. Otherwise, if there is only one sight-saving class the grades should be limited to not more than six with an enrolment of 12 or 14 children. Whenever numbers permit only one or two grades to a room the teacher can easily care for 18 or 20 children. The size of the class then, depends entirely on the number of grades represented.

TYPES OF CLASSES

There are two distinct methods of conducting sight-saving classes — the segregated and the coordinated. The segregated type tends to keep the children in the sight-saving classroom for all their work. This, of course, elimi-

nates all working contracts with normal children. The coordinated method is much more desirable as the children have a chance to compete with regular groups. Fully 90 per cent of all the sight-saving classes in the United States are conducted this way. Here the children are enrolled in the sight-saving class and any work which requires the use of the eyes is done under the direction of the sight-saving class teacher. For oral work the children attend the classes in the regular grades. Since many of these children will spend their entire school life in a sight-saving class, it is essential that they come in contact with the regular grade teachers and pupils. Children learn a great deal from each other and, also, the influence of more than one teacher is often helpful.

The organization in some school systems seems to necessitate running a segregated class by keeping the children in the sight-saving class for all academic work. This type tends to build up an emotional attitude in the children. They feel that they are different from the normal groups, and this is one reaction which should be guarded against. It is also essential that sight-saving class children should not fall behind in their work because in some cases the eye condition will so improve that they will be able eventually to return to the regular classroom.

QUALIFICATIONS OF TEACHERS

To qualify as a teacher of a sight-saving class in New York State it is necessary to be a graduate of a New York State normal school, or its equivalent, and to hold a per-

manent state license to teach in the same grades as those of the sight-saving class. In addition, the State Education Department requires 12 credit hours of training in the field of special education, six of these credit hours to be definite training in sight-saving class work. These requirements can be met by attending the summer session at State Teachers College at Buffalo or some other recognized institution offering similar courses.

The prerequisites of a successful sight-saving class teacher are numerous. She must possess the essential qualifications of any good teacher, that is, have sound physical and mental health, a natural aptitude for teaching, a strong personality with sincere enthusiasm and a spirit of cooperation. Two or three years of successful teaching experience in the regular grades is essential. Experience in teaching blind pupils will not be accepted as qualifying to teach a sight-saving class.

LENGTH OF SCHOOL DAY

It is advisable that the children attending a sight-saving class have the same academic length of school day as those attending the regular classroom. This is done in order that the children may be able to cover an essential amount of prescribed work. In addition to the regular teaching requirements the teacher has the responsibility of daily and hourly remembering that each child is suffering from eye difficulties that need constant care. It is therefore necessary for sight-saving children to have plenty of time for periods in which to rest their eyes and still not feel the

discouragement that would accompany failure to keep to regular grade standards. The noon hour may very profitably be given to rest and recreation aside from sufficient time for the lunch period.

CLASSROOM, EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES

There are many essential items to take in consideration when choosing a sight-saving classroom.

- 1 It should be centrally located and easily accessible to car lines and means for transportation.

- 2 It is necessary to choose a regulation classroom, well-ventilated and providing ample space for the children to move about and to place their seats and desks in a position enabling them to secure the best light.

- 3 A room having unilateral lighting is recommended, preferably with an eastern exposure. If this is not possible, avoid a southern exposure, since a constantly changing light may be very trying to the children. Glass window space should equal at least one-fifth, preferably one-fourth, of the floor space.

The walls of a sight-saving room should be a light buff or gray and the ceilings a white or light cream in a flat finish since these will give good reflective values without glare. The woodwork should all be dull finish.

It is important that the window shades be selected with care in order that the light entering the windows be regulated as well as possible. The best results have been obtained by having each window equipped with two translucent shades of buff color. These two shades should be

hung at the center of the window, one pulling up and one pulling down. These will help to diffuse and to distribute the outside light. Care must be taken in placing the shades so that there will be no space between the two rollers to permit a ray of sunlight.

Artificial lighting is of equal importance since it is often necessary to use it to supplement natural light. An inclosed semi-indirect globe has proved to be most satisfactory. Lighting facilities should always be kept clean, as dust and dirt will cause a great deal of depreciation. It is safe to say that a room can not have too much light; glare must not be confused with amount. The usual classroom should have six outlets, each containing a 300-watt lamp.

The blackboards in a sight-saving room are used a great deal by the children in the preparation of work. For this reason they should be as extensive as possible and of good slate. An ideal arrangement allows a slight projection at the top with several lights above to give sufficient light. The blackboard lights should be on a separate switch so that they will be in use only when necessary.

In considering desks it is essential to have adjustable tops that can be raised to a slant in order that the child's work may be brought to a proper angle and then lowered when necessary. Desks as well as the other furniture in the room should be in dull finish, with sizes selected that will fit children of various grades.

Since the children of a sight-saving class usually come from considerable distance it is impossible for them to go

home at the noon hour. If there is not a cafeteria or home economics department within the building, equipment for serving a hot dish at noon during the winter months is necessary. This may be handled in one of several ways. With an available electric hot plate some suitable dish may be prepared by the older children or food brought from home in jars by the children may be heated in a vat of water. If there is a hot dish this should be supplemented by sandwiches and fruit brought from home. Every place will, of course, provide the easiest and most efficient possible way of taking care of the situation. Too much time must not be used for preparing and clearing the lunch. There should also be recreation and relaxation during the noon hour.

There are certain supplies typical of a sight-saving room which are absolute requisites in conducting a class. They include:

- 1 Large-type books are perhaps the most important item.¹ These are expensive, but if care is taken in ordering so that each child has a copy, it is necessary to order only a few each year until a complete library is established. There must be some reading material for each grade represented with a gradual addition of supplementary material.

- 2 The most desirable paper to be used is of rough finish and a deep cream in color. Manila drawing paper answers the purpose very well for unruled paper. When ruling is

¹ These are purchased from The Clear Type Publishing Co., 36 Elston road, Upper Montclair, N. J.

desired the best results may be obtained from green lines about three-quarters of an inch apart.

3 Most of the written work is done with soft black lead pencils so that the child will have as little difficulty as possible in seeing his work. Special pens should also be provided as well as soft chalk for all board work.

4 All children of fifth grade and above should be taught typewriting as a means of conserving vision. This necessitates having at least one typewriter with large type and a copyholder which will place the copy directly in front of the pupil for every sight-saving class.¹ As soon as a child masters the keyboard he should begin to make use of this knowledge in the preparation of lessons.

5 A sand table has been found to be very useful especially with a primary group. Bulletin boards are also valuable if the material displayed is used with discretion.

6 An essential piece of equipment, especially for intermediate grades is a 12 or 18-inch globe made for use in a sight-saving room. If money is not available for this it is quite sufficient to take an old globe, paint the land masses in one color — preferably black — and the oceans in another color. The surface of the globe should always be dull and may be obtained by using a flat varnish over the whole surface.

¹ It is desirable to have one large size typewriter and copyholder for every five or six pupils in the class.

TRANSPORTATION

As it is necessary for the children attending a sight-saving class to travel from various parts of the city some means of transportation should be provided. Whenever possible the parents should assume this responsibility. If there is no school bus service it may be necessary to transfer an older brother or sister to the school where the special class is located in order to act as a guide. When no other arrangements can be made, however, it may seem advisable to secure an older child as a guide especially for the young children. These guides are paid a small fee and their carfare, usually by the board of education. Since a child with defective eyesight must be made as independent as possible, if he is able, he should go to and from his school by himself.

The transportation of a rural or semirural child would present an individual problem that would need careful consideration.

II PROBLEMS OF INSTRUCTION

PROGRAM MAKING

Great care must be taken in the making of a program. This necessitates close cooperation between the sight-saving teacher, the school principal and regular classroom teachers. The sight-saving class must be run in accordance with the system on which the school is run, whether it is platoon, individualized instruction or traditional type teaching.

During the first days of school the sight-saving teacher determines in consultation with her principal the regular grades to which each one of her children is to be assigned for oral work. In conferences with the various teachers she obtains copies of their programs and as tactfully as possible gives necessary suggestions as to the seating and other arrangements for the sight-saving class children. From the various programs she will be enabled to determine at what hours of the day her children will be able to go to the regular grades for oral work. After all this information is obtained comes the mechanics of making a program. A sight-saving class program must be flexible, and three definite items must be constantly kept in mind to serve as checks:

- 1 There must be no two consecutive periods of close eye work.
- 2 Every child must have his share of the teacher's time.
- 3 The teacher must be careful not to try to teach two things at a time.

The most simple type of program is made from sheets of paper blocked into rectangles that will horizontally represent the hours or periods of the school day and vertically the classes enrolled in the room. The activities that the various groups will carry on in the regular grades are then filled in their respective rectangles. In the remaining spaces the sight-saving teacher arranges the work that is to be carried on in the special class. This may be work carried on with the teacher or independently by the child.

The names of all subjects that the children are expected to recite in the regular rooms are printed in the rectangles in green ink, the color following the idea of the traffic signal meaning "to go." Subjects taught in the special room are labeled in red designating that the children stay in their own room; activities that the children carry on alone are labeled in black. In buildings where there is apt to be considerable shifting of programs it is more convenient if a chart is made consisting of a series of slots into which small papers with the subjects written on them can be easily shifted from one slot to another.

It must be kept in mind that the first function of a sight-saving class teacher is to save sight, and every activity should be initiated with this aim in mind.

CURRICULUM — ACADEMIC AND INDUSTRIAL

Mention has been made that all work requiring the use of the eyes must necessarily be taken in the sight-saving class under the direction of the special teacher with all sight-saving aids possible. These as a rule constitute reading, writing, arithmetic, spelling, typewriting and handwork. The regular grade oral work in social studies, language and music appreciation may be participated in and greatly enjoyed by the sight-saving child. This work may be handled in several ways. For instance, the special class teacher must determine the simplest way of finding out plans and assignments for the next day in order that she may help her children to prepare their lessons.

One of the easiest ways of getting assignments for the sight-saving child is to have one of the children in the

regular grade write down anything that is to be prepared or do any copying necessary. The regular teacher may be willing to write the assignment in a small notebook that the sight-saving pupil carries with him. It is a good plan, however, for the sight-saving teacher to check up on assignments frequently, seeing each regular teacher several times a week to be sure that nothing is being omitted.

There are several ways of helping the sight-saving child meet the needs of the regular classroom. Very little textbook material used by children in the regular grades can be used by the sight-saving class child because of the small type. There is some material that may be found in large-type books that are printed especially for use by sight-saving class pupils, in which case all that is necessary is to give the book to the child, who will go ahead with the lesson to be prepared just as if he were in the regular grade using the small-type textbook. Where the large-type books do not cover the assignment the special teacher should read aloud the material from the textbook used in the regular grades. Care should be taken in reading aloud that the lesson is not taught. A sight-saving class is not a coaching class. Certain subjects are taught in it, others in the regular grade; there should be no duplicate teaching. It simply makes available, either orally or through large-type books, materials which the handicapped child would be unable to use were he in the ordinary grade. For instance, if the geography lesson that is being prepared calls for the use of maps, it is the duty of the sight-saving class teacher to provide suitable ones for the pupil.

After the lesson is prepared, the child returns to the regular grade for recitation. In language work the sight-saving class child should stay in the regular classroom for all oral work and general discussion. When the regular grade pupils start to prepare compositions or do any written work the sight-saving child should return to the special room to do his work, either on the typewriter or with the special material that he is accustomed to using. Many times material must be made available by copying either by hand or on the typewriter that is equipped with greatly enlarged type. This transcribing is done by the special teacher unless she has the advantage of some clerical help.

It is advisable for each sight-saving class pupil to have an individual program so that he may know in what order his lessons follow one another and just what he is expected to do every period of the day. He can then be held responsible, and it is a great help if each child knows thoroughly how his program works from day to day.

There must always be as little interruption as possible when the sight-saving class children enter and leave a regular grade room. Since it is not easy, as a rule, for the regular teacher to have children going and coming at all hours of the day, as much consideration as possible should be shown her. Punctuality is essential. The children should be at the classroom door exactly on time and should enter in a quiet and orderly manner; when they are dismissed they should leave the room in the same way. With a knowledge of conditions and an appreciation

of each child's handicap the regular grade teachers will usually give their full share of cooperation.

Some forms of homemaking and industrial training may be taken with the regular groups of children. Very close cooperation between the sight-saving teacher and the home-making and the industrial arts teachers is needed, however, to eliminate certain branches of the work that would be injurious to the sight, such as sewing, mechanical drawing and sawing along lines, unless they are very black ones. The girls may take work in the preparation and serving of meals, the care and furnishings of rooms and the selecting of ready-to-wear garments.

SPECIAL METHODS

Reading. This is one of the most difficult problems in sight-saving work. The great majority of the children in the sight-saving class should have their reading limited to that of the informational type with very little for pleasure until such a time as their eye condition becomes fixed or improved. It is necessary to substitute other activities to satisfy their reading desire.

There is an adequate amount of large-type readers published. These are expensive but enough of them should be available in every room to teach the children the fundamental process of reading. It must always be remembered that the time may come when each individual may be able to read for pleasure. There must be an effort made to satisfy a child's desire for stories through reading aloud at school and at home by the teacher, parents or

brothers and sisters. Other forms of amusements such as clubs, gardens and recreational activities must be encouraged to gratify the child's desires. The children should not be allowed to go to the library for books. If a child should do outside reading he may possibly break down in one evening's reading all the good that has been accomplished in many days in the sight-saving class.

Arithmetic. In teaching arithmetic the aims are exactly the same as for any other group of children. Two things must be kept in mind; first, that the children must be taught to solve everyday problems, and second, they must be held to the regular grade standards. Children should not be kept doing problems of a process that they have learned to master. Be certain that every day's work is of value.

There are no arithmetic books printed in the large type that deal with modern methods. It is necessary for the teacher either to copy the problems on the board or on paper with India ink or a heavy lead pencil. Whenever there are several children in the same grade it is a great saving of the teacher's time to copy the problems once and then cut them apart so that each child has one or two problems, which, as soon as he has finished, he exchanges with another member of the class. In this way each child completes the task with very little effort on the teacher's part.

Oral arithmetic is very important to the sight-saving class pupils. They should be trained to do as much work

mentally as possible. It is a good test for them to go into the regular grade for oral arithmetic in order that they may see how they compare with the others. Often this is where the sight-saving child excels and it is encouraging for him to find that he can do as well as children with normal vision.

Writing. There is no one method of writing to be taught in a sight-saving class. Children entering the first grade seem to profit most, however, by being taught manuscript writing. This type gives the highest degree of legibility, it necessitates learning only one alphabet, there is less fatigue in muscular control, and because there are no extra strokes it is easily acquired. Since children entering the higher grades have established writing habits they present an entirely different problem. It may be unnecessary to change the habits formed, but large and round letters with all superfluous lines omitted should be required.

Writing placed on the blackboard by the teacher should be legible and easily read by the sight-saving children. Extra strokes may cause difficulty in its being read. The size of the letters will depend upon the distance at which the writing is to be read but it is important to have the work at the level of the child's eyes, with the words and letters well spaced. Lines on the blackboard are to be discouraged as they are sometimes the cause of eye fatigue.

It is not advisable to give formal writing lessons except in the lower grades, for they add an additional tax on the

eyes. There is plenty of opportunity to stress good writing habits in other written work in the upper grades.

Whenever it is possible in upper grades all written work should be done on the typewriter as this aids greatly in saving sight. If done with pen and ink, the pens should have a blunt point and the ink should either be India ink or a combination of India and regular ink. Unlined paper is usually preferred to the lined. It may be necessary to use the latter at times, especially with children beginning writing in order to assist in keeping their writing well spaced and straight.

Typewriting. Typing should be one of the best taught subjects in a sight-saving room. Standard typewriters equipped with enlarged type and heavily inked ribbon should be available for use by every child in a sight-saving room, fifth grade or above. This should never be taught as a vocation but as a means of conserving sight.¹

Music. Sight-saving class children should not be deprived of music. As a rule it is impossible for these children to read musical notes but they should be taught rote songs and musical appreciation either in the special room or in the regular grade room.

Physical training. There should be close cooperation between the physical education instructor and the sight-

¹ An Outline of Lessons in Typewriting for Sight-Saving Class Pupils; by the National Society for the Prevention of Blindness, 450 Seventh avenue, New York City. This pamphlet may be obtained free of charge by writing to the society.

saving teacher. This is necessary since the sight-saving children should participate with the regular grades in physical training but only upon the approval of the oculist who has charge of the child's eyes. Some types of cases should have certain restrictions. Careful attention should also be given to posture defects that have been caused by visual defects.

Eye hygiene. One important aim in establishing a sight-saving class is to teach the children how to save their eyes in every way possible. This must be done in such a way that the children will acquire the best eye habits and care without becoming morbid on the subject. They should be taught to recognize their limitations and be conscious of the best possible means of promoting the most efficient use of their eyes. The teacher must know each child's disability through the oculist's reports and be prepared to direct each child accordingly.

Handwork. Handwork should not be given sight-saving children simply to keep them busy while other classes are reciting. The work must be motivated. The sand table if rightly used is a valuable educational tool to sight-saving classes since the children are deprived of working out many projects in other ways. Poster work is valuable in illustrating some particular phase of study but there should be a very limited use of crayons as they make a shiny surface for the children to look at. Whenever color is needed the children should use colored paper or paints. All cutting should be freehand including the making of posters and lettering.

HIGH SCHOOL WORK

Junior high school. Sight-saving classes have been established mainly for the elementary grades but they should include the junior high school pupils and should be conducted in the same manner as in the elementary grades, since these pupils are not old enough to assume the responsibility of caring for their sight.

Senior high school. By the time the sight-saving class pupil reaches senior high school he should have a definite understanding of his particular eye condition and be aware of his limitations. He should be placed with those of normal vision and have as an adviser a sight-saving class teacher. One of the best ways of aiding such pupils is to have a student reader who is a member of the same class read aloud the assigned lessons from the regular textbooks. These readers are chosen on the basis of their academic standing with preference given to the ones who would benefit by the compensation earned. A very nominal sum is usually paid these student readers.

All written work, as far as possible, should be done on a large print typewriter and all home work should be eliminated. Everything should be done to help these pupils to receive as complete an education as possible.

VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

Vocational guidance is of great interest and concern to all sight-saving class teachers. They must constantly study their children to discover their vocational aptitudes and tendencies and gradually direct them along those lines

which hold the most for future training. As soon as the sight-saving class teacher discovers possibilities in any of her children she should consult with the oculist and confer with their parents, as a mutual understanding with them is very necessary. It may take considerable time and effort to establish this relationship but with tactful contacts it can be brought about. Some parents fully realize their child's limitations but many times parents are over-ambitious for their child's future and in that way lose sight of their physical condition. All these adjustments are essential to the child's happiness and future success.

When there is a vocational school connected with the public school system there should be close cooperation between it and the sight-saving department. The sight-saving class teacher should be able to give detailed reports on children entering from her class as to their eye limitations, their interests and prospects for future vocations. She should always keep informed of each child's progress and be ready to encourage, guide and direct whenever possible.

RECREATION

Another important phase of sight-saving class work is to help children with limited eyesight make wise use of their leisure time. One night of reading, sewing or attending a motion picture show could very easily undo much that has been accomplished in a sight-saving classroom. Teacher and parents must cooperate in directing the child's activities. Parents, as well as the children, must realize

the dangerous possibilities of unwise use of the eyes as they are the ones responsible for the way time is spent outside of school hours. The children should be encouraged to play out-of-doors as much as possible, be content with having someone else read aloud to them, select games and types of indoor occupation including household responsibilities that are not injurious to the eyes and in this way conserve the sight which they possess.

A wise teacher can so initiate and direct the classroom handwork that the interest will carry over into leisure activities. The more this is done, the greater will be the response to ideal situations.

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